

LII NEWS: October 2000

This report to the members, supporters and sponsors of the Legal Information Institute (LII) is long overdue. It launches an ongoing newsletter series that will provide accounts of LII developments that may not be immediately evident to those who frequent lii.law.cornell.edu or subscribe to any of the [LIIBULLETINS](#). The LII NEWS (as we shall call this series) will also draw attention to new and improved collections, publications, and services of the Institute.

I. GOING ON BEHIND THE SERVERS

A. International Conference of Leaders in the Non-Commercial Distribution of Legal Information

This summer the LII convened an invitational conference that drew representatives of some of the leading non-commercial legal information sites from around the globe. The list included leaders from the UK, Australia, South Africa, Canada, Norway, the U.S. Congress, and selected state legislatures and bar associations directly involved in the dissemination of judicial decisions. The week-long agenda included both technical issues and institutional ones. The former included the feasibility of developing data standards to enable cross-collection, cross-site, resource location and interoperability. The relationship between public law-making bodies and third-party non-commercial legal information gathers, organizers, and distributors was a prime focus of the latter. The group represented a wide range of institutional models. In Norway, [Lovdata](#) has endured as a shared venture of the Ministry of Justice and the University of Oslo. The [Australasian Legal Information Institute](#), operating in an environment like that in Norway where there are negligible commercial on-line resources, has achieved semi-official status in the distribution of decisions from some Australian courts. In contrast, the situation in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, and the U.K. with entrenched commercial systems and varying levels of legal information expertise and professionalism in the public sector pointed to a different though no less important role for independent entities like the LII. (Later in the summer our Canadian colleagues guided the launch of the [Canadian Legal Information Institute](#), CanLII, an initiative of the Federated Law Societies of Canada.)

The week-long conference concluded with agreement that the type of information sharing and coordinated planning it had made possible held immense value. The group will: 1) endeavor to meet again as the Association for Public Access to Legal Information, 2) undertake a short list of specific projects aimed at enabling cross-site resource location, and 3) explore ways to assist developing countries in adapting legal information technology to their distinctive needs.

B. LEDA (Legal Education Document Archive) - A Technology to Support Distributed Commentary Collections

Collaboration between the Legal Information Institute and the Harvard Law School Library has produced the prototype for a distributed library of legal commentary. The system breaks with the "one central server holds all" model. It will allow participating institutions to integrate local collections of articles, working papers and other non-book materials into a discipline-wide electronic archive or digital library. Each institution will be able to set its own standards for inclusion, including implementation of a policy of "self-service" faculty self-publication and selective publication of student seminar papers. Duke and Emory have joined Cornell and Harvard in an initial prototype-testing phase. The Wisconsin State Bar Association is seriously interested, for the system should be at least as attractive to researchers and authors outside the legal academy as within.

LEDA's underlying technology and protocols come from the cutting edge of academic research on digital libraries, and enable integration of law-specific collections with others conforming to the so-called "Santa Fe standards" for digital-library metadata and interoperation. In this way we can both draw on and contribute to an exciting body of work taking place in the digital library community generally.

C. The LII Grows by One (to Five)

The people of the LII expanded by one in September. Brian Hughes joined Co-directors Bruce and Martin, Systems Coordinator Patrice Crooks, and part-time Administrative Coordinator Linda Majeroni. Hughes comes to the Institute from the Harvard Law School Library and is our first full-time programmer. Like virtually all of those that make use of the LII collections and services, Brian is not based in Ithaca. He commutes daily via the Net from his home in Medford, MA. The initial projects that have benefited from his skill are the database supporting the LII's distance learning activities (see below) and our collection of information on pending Supreme Court cases.

At this writing, Brian is engaged in a substantial upgrade to our version of the Code of Federal Regulations that will improve both its currency and its format. Your support helps make such improvements possible.

II. NEW THIS FALL

A. Updated Materials, Additions to Existing Services

Summer time is maintenance and building time at the LII. Legal resources on the Net are expanding at an ever increasing pace. Identifying, evaluating, and integrating those resources into a useful research environment requires regular, systematic review. A summer editorial team, closely supervised by Martin and Bruce, both updated and expanded the scope of the LII Web pages that provide organized access to [state legal materials](#), our [World pages](#), the [American Legal Ethics Library](#), and the ["Law About ..." pages](#) which provide overview, primary authority access, and focused commentary sources in areas of the law ranging from Admiralty to Workers Compensation. The team also revised the full set of downloadable materials, including notably the LII's [Introduction to Basic Legal Citation](#) (revised to conform to the new 17th edition of the Bluebook), the federal rules, and key federal statutes. Finally, it prepared the 2000-2001 edition of our CD-ROM collection of Historic Supreme Court decisions, widely used in high schools, colleges, and library settings.

B. LII Distance Learning Courses

Four years ago the Institute offered its first "distance learning" course. Using the Internet, it offered a law course, for credit, to students of four participating law schools. The experiment's underlying aim (shared by all the participating schools) was to discover ways that network communication, with its ability to nullify barriers imposed by distance and advantages provided by proximity, could be used to reach distant students (of many kinds) and to give resident students wider educational options. The original experiment yielded positive results and the course was repeated with continuing modification in 1997-98 and 1998-99. Relying in significant part on real-time video conferencing the course was limited by both scheduling constraints -- the students had to assemble at the same time across three time zones -- and the amount of effective teacher-student exchange possible in that format.

This year the Institute is offering two courses to students at a wide range of law schools in a format that provides greater interactivity by breaking out of the classroom mold. (An overview is available at: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/background/distance/distance00.htm>). This fall 100 students from four participating schools (from West to East - Seattle, Kansas, Chicago-Kent, and Vermont) are studying Copyright Law with the LII using a mix of streaming multi-media presentation, programmed learning materials, and Web-based discussion. Next term students from a different set of schools will take an LII course on Social Security law. Both courses draw the assigned readings from the LII's digital law library and both are prototypes for distance learning materials that will in future years be offered to a much wider range of users, alongside the LII's collection of legal documents and written commentary.

III. IN A FUTURE LII NEWS

While the Legal Information Institute has, from its start in 1992, made extensive use of the talent and skills of Cornell Law students and the programming experience of a few moonlighting computer science students, it has not until this fall enjoyed a formal working relationship with the university's Department of Computer Science. Currently, fifteen graduate students from that department, working in two different teams, are engaged on LII projects as part of their coursework in software engineering. As the work is not complete a full report would be

premature, but the interdisciplinary partnership it represents holds promise. You can expect more about this term's projects in a future newsletter.

IV. CONTACTING US

If you have questions or comments about any of the above or suggestions for improvements in the LII site and other services, don't hold back - send us mail. Indeed, we have created a special channel for our special friends. To use it send your messages to: member_mail@lii.law.cornell.edu

From the Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School

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